

Washington, DC - With the House likely to approve a final health care reform bill later this week, Congressman Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) today highlighted the immediate benefits that Americans would see upon the bill's passage. Congress is closer than ever to reforming the country's broken health insurance system with a plan that puts Americans in control of their health care choices, holds insurance companies accountable and makes coverage more affordable.

"This health care bill will provide immediate benefits to the American people as soon as it is signed into law," Hinchey said. "When enacted, seniors, small businesses, young people and Americans who have been victimized by greedy insurance companies will have new protections and lower-cost options for care. The bill pending before the House would reign in health care costs to relieve a huge financial burden on so many American families, improve the quality of coverage, and help insure tens of millions of Americans who currently have no access to health insurance."

Once the bill goes into effect, Americans who are uninsured because of a pre-existing condition will be able to buy affordable coverage through a temporary high-risk pool, and insurers will be banned from denying coverage to children with pre-existing conditions. Insurance companies will be prohibited from dropping people when they get sick, and lifetime limits and restrictive annual limits on coverage from insurance companies will be eliminated.

Small businesses will also see an immediate benefit from the bill with the creation of a tax credit of up to 35 percent of premiums, and young people will be allowed to remain on their parents' insurance policy until their 26th birthday. Seniors who fall into the Medicare prescription drug coverage gap known as the "donut hole" will immediately have access to a \$250 rebate, and preventative services and immunizations under Medicare will no longer require a co-payment.

To improve access to care, the bill will immediately create new training programs to increase the number of primary care doctors, nurses and public health professionals across the country. The bill also includes funding for community health centers, allowing them to almost double the amount of patients they treat over the next five years.

"When this bill is enacted, Americans who have waited over six decades for reform will finally begin to see the relief they desperately need," said Hinchey. "We simply cannot afford to wait any longer to address the skyrocketing premiums and insurance company abuses that

Americans have endured for far too long."

Hinchey also noted that while the bill represents a major step forward, it still does not accomplish everything that is needed to improve the delivery of health care. For instance, the bill lacks a provision that would allow Medicare to negotiate with pharmaceutical companies for bulk discount deals, which could save taxpayers up to \$156 billion over ten years. To address that and other issues, the Congressman will continue working for additional legislation that further improves the quality of Medicare and makes health care more comprehensive, accessible and affordable for all Americans.